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Viewing cable 06PORTAUPRINCE867, PREVAL'S CHIEF FOREIGN POLICY FORECASTS PRAGMATISM

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06PORTAUPRINCE867	2006-05-15 20:03	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Port Au Prince

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SUBJECT: PREVAL'S CHIEF FOREIGN POLICY FORECASTS PRAGMATISM

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 856

Classified By: DCM Griffiths for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Fritz Longchamp, Rene Garcia Preval's foreign policy advisor provided a circumspect review of the major foreign policy issues facing the new administration to Emboffs May 8. Longchamp claimed that the Preval team had yet to focus on external relations and develop a foreign policy agenda. Despite his initial reservation, he eventually noted particular significance of relations with Latin America and CARICOM, the PRC/Taiwan conundrum, and the need to re-organize the Foreign Ministry and diplomatic services. Longchamp would not speculate on Preval's cabinet. He was particularly ardent in disclaiming the likelihood of his assuming the role of Foreign Minister. End Summary.

Foreign Policy Specialist

¶2. (C) Longchamp is an experienced foreign policy specialist with extensive diplomatic credentials. He served as Haiti's Ambassador to the UN 1991-1995, and as Foreign Minister 1995-2001, during Jean Bertrand Aristide's and Preval's first terms. Longchamp told emboffs that despite Preval's recent international itinerary, a foreign relations/policy commission had not been formed to develop an international policy agenda. Preval and his transition team have focused on the major domestic issues, recognizing that Preval will have a short honeymoon and must deliver improvements soon. Longchamp cautioned not to expect "the same names" in Preval's new cabinet. He seemed particularly adamant in reference to himself and a ministerial position, although he did say he would remain part of Preval's team as an advisor.

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¶3. (C) After overcoming his initial reticence to discuss an informal foreign policy agenda, Longchamp began his comments with the importance that Preval places on Haiti's relations with the Dominican Republic noting that Preval's first trip after his election was to the DR. Haiti's future is inextricably linked to the DR and the historical, political and economic ties cannot be underestimated. Preval's public comments, including his May 14 inaugural address to the nation, maintain Haiti-DR relations as a priority.

Cuba and Venezuela

¶4. (C) On Cuba and Venezuela, he said Preval's relations with those two countries were practical and not ideological. Preval visited Cuba April 12-14 and Venezuela April 24-25. Cuba is a special case for Haiti, he said, due to the historical ties shared by the two countries. Longchamp claimed that there were 1.5 million Cubans of Haitian descent in Cuba. He contrasted the integration of that Cuban-Haitian population with the lack of integration of Haitians in Dominican society, saying that he had met persons of Haitian descent throughout all social and political levels in Cuba. Diplomatic relations with Cuba were re-established during Longchamp's tenure as Foreign Minister. In one of the last acts as President during his first term, in February 1996 Jean Bertrand Aristide formally restored diplomatic relations with the neighboring island nation broken off in 1962. Two years later, Longchamp personally opened the Haitian Embassy in Havana.

¶5. (C) Cuban assistance in the health field has particular

resonance in Haiti. The doctors Cuba sends to provide basic health care in both urban and rural areas enjoy almost mythic status among the Haitian population. Longchamp commented that during his trip to Cuba in April, Preval discussed with Cuban officials the expansion of the health assistance program to provide a doctor in each commune in Haiti. Additionally, the assistance program will also provide medical training opportunities for Haitians to study medicine in Cuba in order to return to Haiti and eventually replace the Cuban doctors.

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¶16. (C) Haiti's power generation capacity is hobbled by corruption and mismanagement of Haiti's National Electricity Company (EDH) resulting in an inability to provide more than a few hours of electricity per day. Often, neighborhoods, poor and wealthy alike, go several days without electricity. Preval views Haiti's May 14 accession to Chavez' Petrocaribe (reftel) as a deal too good to pass up that offers him the chance to answer one of Haiti's most crucial needs almost immediately. In addition to Longchamp's claim of practicality versus ideology, Préval has publicly claimed his ties to both Venezuela and Cuba are a result of necessity, not related to ideology.

Taiwan and the PRC

¶17. (C) In comments that seemed to weigh the most heavily on him, Longchamp said that very difficult decisions were ahead for the Preval foreign policy team with respect to relations with the PRC and Taiwan. Taiwan's active diplomacy is readily apparent throughout the Port-au-Prince area. Additionally, Preval himself has close links to Taiwan, including campaign contributions and funding for the planting of the agronomist's favorite bamboo trees throughout his hometown of Marmelade. (Comment: China's Security Council position and its participation in MINUSTAH forces may trump Taiwan's relations with Haiti. China's recent diplomatic maneuverings resulting in the demotion of the level of Taiwanese representation at the inauguration may be a foreshadowing of how this dilemma may play out. End Comment.)

Latin America and the Caribbean

¶18. (C) Longchamp did not dismiss the importance of CARICOM but clearly there are some fences to be mended between Haiti and the organization. Preval has publicly said that Haiti hopes to take its seat at the CARICOM table in July. CARICOM officials have also said that they will welcome the constitutional Haitian government back into the fold. However, Haiti's level of engagement with CARICOM remains to be determined.

¶19. (C) Longchamp gave a nod to the growing importance in Latin America of the "ABC" countries - Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. These three countries are especially important to Preval given Chilean Juan Gabriel Valdes' role as the UN SecGen's Special Representative in Haiti, Brazil's command of MINUSTAH forces, and Argentina's important MINUSTAH contingent.

Downsizing and Re-organization

¶10. (C) On a more technical and administrative note, Longchamp said that some difficult decisions are ahead with respect to the re-organization of the Foreign Ministry and diplomatic service. He contended that two-thirds of the Foreign Ministry positions would have to be phased out. He said that due to costs, positions at the Ministry and particularly overseas would have to be rationalized according to the Preval administration's foreign policy priorities.

¶11. (C) Comment: Despite his hectic international travel itinerary since his election, Preval has not charted a defined foreign policy course. Much will depend on who he names to the Foreign Minister post. He clearly understands the importance and the necessity of continuing political and economic ties with the U.S., especially in light of pending preferential trade legislation. Further, he must remain constructively engaged with the Dominican Republic. Despite U.S. discomfort with his links to Cuba and Venezuela, Preval seems determined to mine those relationships for what he can obtain. Longchamp is clearly Preval's foreign policy guru. However, his six years of previous service as Foreign Minister may have been enough for him. End Comment.

SANDERSON

=====CABLE ENDS=====